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# **The work of women's NGOs on commercial radio in the West Bank: frustrations and shortcomings**

## **Abstract**

The article examines the work of women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on West Bank radio as they represent women, a marginalised community, within a patriarchal, traditional and religious society. It also examines the commercial and societal difficulties faced by radio stations in their interactions with NGOs. Using a quantitative and qualitative approach, it analyses data from six commercial, rather than state-owned or community, radio stations in four West Bank cities and discusses the frustrations of both parties as they work together. Contributing to the limited literature on the role of radio in the West Bank, the article also draws on interviews with representatives from the chosen stations and the NGOs that broadcast material on radio stations.

The findings suggest that, for the NGOs and in contrast to other media, radio plays an important, albeit currently limited, role as amplifiers for their campaigns. Yet the radio stations do not contribute substantively, if at all, to encouraging NGO community-building activities and, in fact, restrict themselves to a commercial-based association.

Radio in the West Bank, like all the media, operates against a complex background and faces raids, closures and extensive restrictions. This is a result of political divisions within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), commercial pressures from financial backers, and Israeli security policies and military activities which continue to hinder press freedom. Not only do the media have to face a unique combination of political, economic and commercial environments but their own shortcomings are many and include a restrictive yet vague legal framework, no internal regulator, violations against journalists, and top-down

political pressure potentially resulting in a submissive media (Jamal, 2005, 2000; Hillel and Khalil, 2003; Shinar, 1987; Thawabteh, 2010).

As a single component, local radio plays a particularly important role in conflict-affected zones such as the West Bank. It is widely used by the local community and considered by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to be the most useful in encouraging awareness of, and participation in, community projects. This article provides a critical overview of commercial radio in the West Bank from the viewpoints of the radio stations themselves and their work with NGOs, and of the NGOs as they promote their advocacy and community-building activities. Women's NGOs, which are particularly strong in the West Bank, are used here as representatives of NGOs in the West Bank generally, as their material features constantly amongst radio broadcasts. Using both a quantitative and qualitative approach, this article examines the frustrations of both parties as they work together. Furthermore, it discusses how women's NGOs work with radio stations as they represent women, a marginalised community, within a patriarchal, traditional and religious society and the commercial and societal difficulties faced by radio stations in their interactions with NGOs.

## **Radio in the West Bank**

Despite being the oldest form of broadcasting, and one whose position has been usurped time after time as new types of media emerge, radio with its various characteristics has maintained its place in society, particularly in conflict-affected zones. As a community-building tool, radio's contribution to democracy is potentially significant as the audience can engage actively in the public sphere through phone-ins, talk shows and discussions (Chignell, 2009; Hartley, 2000). Yet it can also be used not only to promote community identity but also national and commercial interests, and thus national identity (Hendy, 2000; Scannell, 1992).

Radio provides a low-cost and low-tech public space; it is cheap and portable and does not rely on a mains source of electricity, in contrast to television. This is particularly relevant in the OPT where there are daily twelve-hour power cuts in Gaza. In the West Bank, many towns and cities have suffered lengthy daily power cuts since the Israel Electric Corporation (IEC), energy supplier to the West Bank, started imposing sanctions on the Palestinian Authority to force it to repay significant accumulated debts (Eldar, 2106; Khoury, 2016). The affordability of radio helps to connect and inform developing regions or, as considered in this article, isolated regions in conflict-affected areas. It can also target illiterate or orally-based cultures which might exist in similar marginalised communities. In combination, these characteristics ensure its growing role within conflict-affected communities and because of this, it forms an integral and essential tool in promoting NGOs' advocacy and community-based projects.

Yet, according to Lewis, radio is 'taken for granted; few of us discuss it, it needs no explanation: we listen to the radio. Yet this habit, and the intimate things it does for us as a friend, trusted informant and sound-track for living, are almost literally unmentionable in public' (2000:161). It is this 'intimate' nature of radio which makes it an ideal source of information and company in traditional and patriarchal societies such as the West Bank. Sensitive issues such as domestic violence, rape, harassment, child abuse and health issues can therefore be discussed as many listeners, again women, might be listening on their own, not in a family or mixed environment, when doing household chores. Connected with this latter point, the 'secondariness' of radio is another important characteristic as people tend to listen to it whilst occupied with other tasks (Chignell, 2009: 99): women listen to it whilst doing the chores (a prevailing characteristic of this patriarchal society), and Palestinians –

male or female – listen to it whilst travelling in private cars or taxis (considering that public transport in the West Bank comprises taxis, shared taxis and mini-buses all of which frequently, if not interminably, play the radio) and in the endless queues at checkpoints.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the ‘localist’ nature of radio which reflects the needs, interests and culture of the local community is relevant in the West Bank. In this case, local communities remain strong not just because of the reduced geographical mobility caused and constantly exacerbated by the occupation but also because of the tribal system which prevails in Palestinian society. As a concept, radio can be understood in various ways (Moylan, 2014). It can represent the actual technology, which now includes podcasts and streaming. It includes the institution itself and the manner in which it engages with its political framework, which cannot be avoided when discussing the impact of the occupation and conflict on the West Bank area. ‘Radio’ also signifies the text which is broadcast and covered by this article’s quantitative analysis. Finally, it is a democratising tool demanding a response from its audience via phone-ins, for example. This article will include references to all of these.

Radio, therefore, has the ability and characteristics to play a significant role as a source of information and a unifying tool in conflict-affected areas. Yet these aspects must be examined within the specific context of Palestine where, pre-Oslo,<sup>2</sup> media were used by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to promote national and cultural values in opposition to the occupation (Shinar, 1987; Jamal, 2000; 2005). They were politicized and, used as a propaganda tool, they failed to comply with principal journalistic norms with little, if any, criticism of the press allowed. During the first intifada (1987-1993) and in the face of Israeli censorship, radio acquired particular significance not only for its news coverage and commentaries but also to mobilise the population (Bookmiller and Bookmiller, 1990). Following the Oslo agreements, there was a brief period of autonomy, as outlined in Abdelhadi’s account of setting up his community station in the West Bank, and the

precarious but vital role played by radio when operating under conflict conditions (2004).

Israeli censorship was (and remains) severe and many Palestinian media outlets were closed and journalists suffered constant harassment. Broadcasts allegedly inciting violence and so-called terrorism against Israel – a widely-used accusation against journalists – have been, and continue to be, cited by the Israeli authorities as grounds for shutting down radio stations. Following a raid in August 2016, Al-Sanabel radio in Hebron was closed on these grounds for three months, five employees were detained and equipment was confiscated (Ma'an, 2016). A few months previously, similar treatment was meted out to Al-Huriya radio station (MADA, 2015). These are just two examples of many that highlight the context of military occupation in which radio stations function. The media also remain subject to financial and political control from the Palestinian Authority with the resultant focus of the main daily news stories being the national elite and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similar state control has continued following the 2006 elections leaving little room for other smaller media sources such as NGOs and grassroots organisations which rely on the media to promote their campaigns (HRW, 2016).

The commercial sector represents another constraint on radio and all media as sponsorship and advertising form a significant proportion of the stations' income. Managers, producers and reporters involved in investigative journalism exposing corruption, which is rife amongst big businesses, are frequently threatened in person or via social networks. According to the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), the number of violations from both Israeli and Palestinian Authority security forces against journalists and media freedoms in the first half of 2015 rose to 224 in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 20 per cent higher than that recorded in the first half of 2014, which in turn was 64 per cent higher than the first half of 2013. These violations were 'physical attacks,

deliberate prevention of coverage, the confiscation of equipment or damaging some of them, arrest, and detention' (MADA, 2015). A further influence affecting the media generally, which is relevant given this article's focus on women's NGOs, is traditional and cultural norms preventing the reporting of religious discrimination, gender problems, incest or negative opinions of Islam. Many of the NGOs who were interviewed stated that this was less of a problem on radio than television or printed press, making it more effective as an outlet for their broadcasts. They also stated that many taboos, particularly regarding honour killings and domestic violence, were very slowly being lifted and coverage of occurrences, albeit without any details, was now appearing (Ashquar, 2015). Further characteristics of radio and influences on it in the West Bank will be discussed throughout the article.

### **NGOs and women's NGOs in the West Bank**

The general opinions and data in this article, whilst not dwelling on particular campaign case studies, are drawn from women's NGOs, used to represent NGOs as whole in Palestine which, in 2009, numbered 2100 in the West Bank and 899 in Gaza in (ICNL, 2015). NGOs in the OPT, like the media generally, are subject to numerous pressures which restrict the effectiveness of their activities. According to the Basic Law, Palestinians have the right 'to form and establish unions, associations, societies, clubs and popular institutions in accordance with the law' (Friedrich, Luethold et al 2008: 34). Women's NGOs, like all NGOs in Palestine, must be considered within the unique context of colonial domination and then military occupation which has resulted in demographic, societal and territorial fragmentation (Dana, 2015). Their pre-1948 origins were in charitable societies which had a broad reach and the ability to recruit extensively throughout society yet their history, which is unique in the broader region, also had roots in the PLO's political organisations and focused on mass mobilisation and the national liberation movement. The grassroots movements behind women's NGOs were founded on extensive networks of volunteers whose aim was

determined by their political stance against the Oslo Accords and their goal of enhancing women's status in the community and improving their daily living conditions (Jad, 2004). As the director of programs at the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) (established in 1993) stated, 'we had a long track record of working with different community sectors even before the emergence of the Palestinian Authority' (Abusrour, 2016).

This changed post-Oslo when the emphasis shifted to state-building and prioritising legislation and the creation of institutions, still within a context of occupation. Foreign donors intentionally distanced themselves from political groups and grassroots movements and, to be best placed to receive funding, many NGOs became depoliticised and professionalised (Hammami, 2000). This resulted in divisions amongst those NGOs that were prepared not to oppose the Oslo Accords to facilitate funding bids; those NGOs who remained in 'opposition' and kept their grassroots stances, hindering their chances of funding; and Fatah-affiliated grassroots women's committees who were able to apply for Western funding but could also receive finance from the Palestinian Authority and Fatah so would be less inclined to apply externally (Jamal, 2015). Rather than pursuing their original goals in the community, women's NGO projects started focusing on short-term goals, such as legislative amendments, stereotype-awareness campaigns and gender-empowerment training programmes. These were perceived to be measurable and achievable by foreign donors but posed simultaneously a compromise to longer term development plans and a replacement of political goals. Women's NGOs, whilst indisputably working towards improvements in women's rights and improvement in social status, have become generally highly professional, dependent on modern communications and, because of financial constraints, risk appearing more accountable to their donors than their constituencies.



Indeed, international funding is the most important source of income to most Palestinian NGOs and amounted to US\$20.4 billion between 1993 and 2011, averaging US\$ 317 per capita annually (Tartir, 2012).

Despite the desire not be politically labelled so as to be able to obtain funding, many of the women's NGOs interviewed for this article still incorporate grassroots constituencies into their organisational structure. The mission statement of the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), for example, declares 'empowering and mobilizing women's participation in the struggle against the Israeli occupation' to be one of its aims (pwwsd.org, 2014).

Levels of independence of NGOs, regarding both donors and the Palestinian Authority, fluctuate despite being defined as being non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations and many still maintain close political affiliations or are subject to severe pressure from the political authorities (Challand 2009). This independence is indeed widely contradicted and compromised. As an example, one women's NGO – the Association of Women's Committees for Social Work (AWCSW) – originally a Fatah-affiliated organisation established in 1993 by a group of women politicians, has its core budget funded by Fatah. The NGO's director not only acknowledged the complexity of this situation but also recognised how her organisation's integrity and objectivity could be compromised. When interviewed in September 2016, they were facing a permanent threat of closure by Fatah as they were actively working against the authority's stance on the then imminent elections by trying to increase the quota of women on the electoral role (AWCSW, 2016). Women's, and indeed all Palestinian, NGOs are therefore walking a tightrope between maintaining a depoliticized and professional status to satisfy potential foreign donors' conditions; not

displeasing the (funding) authorities to avoid possible closure or sanctions; and still responding to the needs of the under-represented communities they seek to serve.

But however defined, NGOs still depend on the services of the media as amplifiers for their advocacy campaigns and to raise awareness of their programmes (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). Indeed, the dependency between media, movements and social change has been widely discussed (Mattoni and Treré, 2014). If NGOs activities are not in the media, they are not reaching their desired targets (politicians and the underrepresented groups they wish to assist) and their goals will effectively not be attained. Given the suitability of radio as a media tool in conflict-affected areas, the article now examines the extent to which it cooperates with NGOs as the latter attempt to broadcast information to the very communities for which radio is ideal, whilst simultaneously fulfilling various donors' requirements, raising public awareness, attracting donations, and influencing political debates (Benthall, 1993; Pollock, 2014; Powers, 2016; Van Leuven and Joye, 2014).

## **Methodology**

This article forms part of a larger project examining local radio involvement in NGO activities in conflict-affected zones. It analyses data from six previously selected profit-making, commercial radio stations in four West Bank towns chosen, variously, because of their size, geographical location, their reach and their cooperation with NGOs. The study did not extend to Gaza. The analysis period was from January to December 2016. There are approximately seventy-five radios in the West Bank, all of which are commercial and owned by families, businesses or NGOs. Voice of Palestine is the only state radio. The number of radio stations was frozen in 2016 as the President halted the issuing of further frequencies (Ministry for Information, 2016). Radio frequencies are controlled by the Israeli authorities

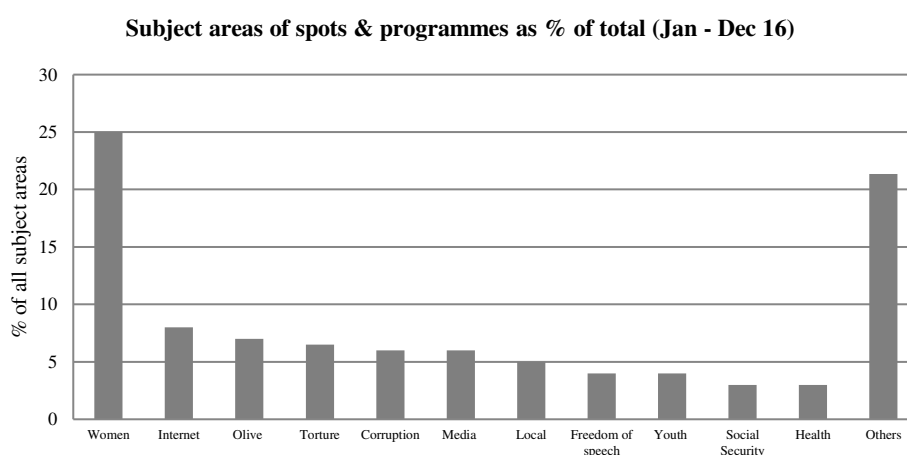
(Arafeh, Bahour et al, 2015) who can, and do, remove these frequencies, particularly to reallocate them to the settlements. Managers and employees of the radio stations were interviewed and they provided their NGO-related data monthly. This data comprised spots – or advertisements – produced by, or on behalf of the NGOs. The spots are short, lasting between 45 and 75 seconds, and represent a very limited broadcast time especially as the donor typically requires its name to be aired too. Each spot would be broadcast three times a day, seven days a week for three months with the radio stations providing discounts for quantity. 178 individual spots were analysed for the broader project with slightly over 25 per cent relating to women's NGOs and women-related topics (Figure 1). In addition to the spots, over sixty NGO-related programmes were analysed amounting to approximately 47 hours of broadcast time. Programmes, comprising a series of episodes lasting about 45 minutes, are broadcast over several weeks and assume various formats (phone-ins, panels, field visits). A further aspect of the overall project, yet to be conducted, will involve interviews with radio listeners.

The overall data was then quantitatively analysed allowing the NGO output to be classified according to subject area (for example, women, corruption, torture, freedom of information, social security, internet). Some NGOs ran campaigns in overlapping areas (corruption, social security, and women) whilst others had narrower mission statements and focused on just one area. Women's NGOs and their output were then identified from the initial quantitative analysis and their material was categorised according to the main themes they covered (Figure 2).

Based on the classification of the women's NGOs and their campaigns, interviews were conducted with sixteen NGOs, and also the Ministry for Women's Affairs and the

Ministry for Information, in various cities to determine the details of how and why they use radio. The interviewees ranged from management to junior positions and were questioned jointly and/or separately. They also included representatives from NGO media departments. The NGOs were therefore not determined in advance based, for example, on their size or location, but because they actively used the chosen radio stations for their output.

The interviewees were asked about their experience with the chosen radio station(s); their use of other media; their media budget; competition from other NGOs; any reluctance by the stations to cover certain subjects; their preference for certain genres of spots; what information had to be conveyed in spots; and the way they monitored the efficacy of media campaigns. By addressing these questions, a qualitative analysis was then conducted regarding the environment in which the NGOs worked with radio, the constraints they faced and the extent to which societal challenges impeded their advocacy campaigns and calls for participation on programmes. Full ethical procedures and all ethical issues were addressed and university clearance was obtained.



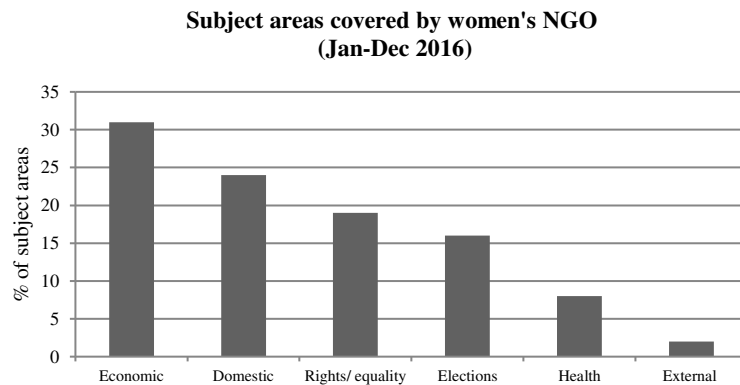


Figure 1 shows the spread of subject areas of NGO-related spots and programmes broadcast by the radio stations during the period January – December 2016. It highlights the significance of women representing slightly over 25 per cent of all subject areas covered by NGOs in their spots and programmes. ‘Others’ include a further eighteen subject areas which only get one or two mentions (electricity, settlers, NGOs, social contract, social responsibility, culture, unions, money). Figure 2 shows the main areas covered by women’s NGOs. Some of the topics are broad and would apply to many countries and conflict-affected zones, such as the economic empowerment of women. Others, again, are applicable to all countries, domestic violence for example, but have aspects which are exacerbated in the patriarchal, traditional and religious society of the West Bank and neighbouring Middle Eastern nations. Another frequently discussed topic during the period of analysis was women’s participation in the planned – and ultimately postponed – 2016 Palestinian municipal elections. This contrasted with the other topics as it was a unique event rather than being part of everyday life.

## **Radio and censorship**

Three of the six chosen radio stations are based in Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of the West Bank. The first is Raya FM, established in 2007, with 43 employees. In contrast with many media outlets in the West Bank, Raya FM maintains working relations with Hamas with an office in Gaza. The second is the relatively new 24FM, which was established in 2014 by four journalists and now has three frequencies and fourteen employees. The third station preferred to remain anonymous (Radio X) but is considered to be one of the largest in the West Bank, with sixty employees and over twenty frequencies. The fourth station is Bethlehem 2000, one of the first stations in the West Bank with a staff of fifteen. It, too, can reach Gaza. The fifth and sixth stations were small and had a limited geographical reach: Al Balad, established in 1997 with ten, mainly part-time, staff members covering the northern city of Jenin and neighbouring Tubas; and Radio Nagham, with seven employees, including freelancers, which covers very local issues and broadcasts to the western border region of Qalqilya. The latter two recognised that they were in a strong position regarding local news but faced strong competition from the Ramallah-based larger stations for items affecting the whole of the West Bank.

A main challenge for all the radio stations was the many forms of censorship to which they are subject from both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, and from commercial sponsors as stated above. Indeed, Freedom House cites ‘extensive obstacles’ facing journalists in the OPT to safe and independent reporting, ranking its press freedom status as ‘not free’ (Freedom House, 2016). Radio X was reluctant to criticise the authorities for fear of reprisals including closure and personal threats. Raya FM was similarly aware of the need not to criticise the major commercial organisations in its broadcasts as many were amongst its main source of advertising income yet recognised the need to balance this with pleasing its

audience (Zama'reh, 2016). It appears to achieve this through the democratising role of regular phone-in programmes with invited guests which form the mainstay of radio schedules in Palestine. Raya FM strives to act as a link between the influential private sector and its listeners and invites representatives of the former to its programmes to answer to the public and seek solutions. Raya's director quoted one NGO-sponsored consumer phone-in when residents of the Al-Azza refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, rang to complain about the Bank of Palestine, a powerful commercial organisation in the West Bank and one of the station's commercial sponsors, and the noise of its air conditioning units which operated twelve hours a day. In this instance, the Bank responded, rang the radio for a recording and acted. The station therefore acted as mediator between the two parties – supporting the community but not antagonising or openly criticising its backers and not provoking potential threats and pressure from them (Zama'reh, 2016).

Despite these severe challenges and pressures on radio, the chosen NGOs still recognise their usefulness, the diversity of their geographical reach and also their assumed ability to target all sectors of the population. The NGOs predict that their use of radio will increase in the future as they acknowledge the significant impact radio, in contrast with other media tools, can have in the West Bank on targeting the large population of women at home and those travelling to and from work. Despite the NGOs interviewed here being women's NGOs, or being involved in women's campaigns, they do not target just women. In campaigns against domestic violence, for example, they also target men as, according to many of the NGOs and as clearly summarised by Radaydeh at the Ministry for Women's Affairs 'men control us, as women' (2016). Decision-makers are also targeted. The two NGOs, PWWSD and AWCSW, both mentioned using radio as a tool to pressure the authorities into adopting a particular stance. AWCSW has used state radio to broadcast spots

that conflict with government policy. By agreeing to air the NGO spots, the authorities have indirectly supported the changes proposed in their spots. A recent example of this was during the elections in 2016 when many women's NGOs collaborated against the authorities to force them to raise the quota of women candidates from 20 per cent to 30 per cent.

### **Costs, income and market awareness**

Radio stations' work with NGOs is secondary to the consistent priorities for all news and information broadcasts: firstly the occupation, and then internal politics. However significant their impact on society, NGO activities will never be able to compete and, according to the dismissive Raya, 'will never be news' (Zama'reh, 2016). A main source of income for all the radio stations is advertising from the private sector with only a small percentage from NGOs (less than 10 per cent in all cases). Raya stated that 50 per cent of its income came from telecommunications and banks, 30 per cent from factories and car manufacturers and 20 per cent from advertising and talk shows. Income from NGO broadcasting was considered to be diminishing and too uncertain and none of the stations were prepared to encourage NGOs or allocate them a greater share of their advertising airtime. They all provided examples of other radio stations that had closed after relying too much on NGO income (Shalback, 2016). Having said that, the stations still broadcast many NGO spots per day: Radio X, as just one example, has 150 spots per day with 10 per cent of these being from NGOs; Bethlehem 2000 quoted 50 NGO spots per week; and Al Balad has eighteen spaces for spots per day, one is for NGOs and the rest are for traditional or local companies.

Costs vary amongst the stations with some allocating NGOs free spots depending on the cause, and many giving reductions or offers for quantity or length of contract. There was



little transparency over prices. Haggling was expected and few of the stations provided official quotes. As could be expected, the larger Ramallah stations charged more, with Radio X charging \$700 per hour; Bethlehem in contrast could be \$220 per hour. Discounts offered by stations are commercially attractive to budget-constrained NGOs and most of the latter cited benefiting from ‘buy one, get one free’ offers. They also acknowledged that radio stations were increasingly focusing on a broader range of topics with a broader range of guests from ministers to local people. On questioning the NGOs about how they select a particular radio station, cost emerged as an important factor. According to the director of AWCSW (2016) production costs can be \$120-\$140 but they can then download the hyperlinks to their material from the radio’s sound clouds and re-play the spot or episode repeatedly via their own social media, thus reducing the initial cost. All the NGOs stated that radio now signifies not just a traditional radio set in the kitchen or in the car, but also digital radio, streaming, downloads and podcasts, and that all of these have to be used in conjunction with social media, whether this belongs to the radio stations, the NGOs or their donors. AWCSW (2016) stated that, although some radio stations in Hebron provided it with free airtime simply because they had a gap in their schedule or because they wished to encourage other NGOs to broadcast their spots, it would generally expect to pay \$6-\$13 for a spot to be broadcast. This contrasts with the \$2-\$3 quoted by the small radio station Nagham which assumed incorrectly that this price was ‘probably more expensive than it was cheap’ (Assaf, 2016). Nagham, like many of the other radios stations, had not conducted any market research of their competitors so had no data to support this assumption.

Although the larger Ramallah-based radio stations have frequencies which reach all the West Bank and therefore are attractive to NGOs for their spots, the findings suggests that smaller local stations might be a better choice of outlet as they would target the immediate

community and its specific problems more accurately and the cost would be lower. However, the lack of market research and availability of data is hindering this and there is no evidence that would support such an approach. There is also insufficient information on audiences which is problematic to the NGOs. Bethlehem 2000, for example, claims to know to whom they broadcast, or whom their programmes would interest, but they have no data to confirm this. They know that their social media audience is 53 per cent females in the 16-55 age group but have no details on their radio audience. They are aware that PalTel, Palestine's Telecommunication group, conducted some market research but this data remained internal. The other radios stations are similarly ignorant of their market.

This lack of empirical data on audiences is a significant source of frustration for the NGOs when determining a cost from the radios despite the very good discounts on offer. The NGOs understandably want to know the reach and audience breakdown of the radio stations before they commit themselves to paying for the production and broadcast of a spot or episode but this information is not readily available. Some of the NGOs (AWCSW, for example) have conducted their own audience surveys but others rely on outdated independent market research information or, less accurate still, on information derived from increases in hits on social media or increases in responses to calls to helplines following the broadcast of a spot or by asking those who ring in how they heard about the NGO and its helpline. They all use a broad range of media (billboards, radio, TV, leaflets, social media) for the same campaign and it is difficult to determine which is most effective. They are more than aware that more audience data would result in a more targeted and more cost effective approach but currently, in some cases, they rely on the reach of the stations' frequencies rather than on information about the audience who listens to its output. Using this data is also challenging

because of changes or reallocations of frequencies by the Israeli authorities to the ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank.

### **Obtaining NGO work and frustrations of the radios**

Receiving work from NGOs is, at first glance, superficially uncomplicated for the radio stations and they appeared keen to work with them, if only from a commercial point of view rather than from an altruistic or community-building one. Spots are considered an easy source of income, with Raya stating that 90 per cent of their NGO income results from NGOs contacting them directly. A certain proportion of NGO income is obtainable through the complex process of proposal writing but all the stations say they are reluctant to pursue this route, which represents an apparent source of irritation, as it is too time-consuming, success rates are low for the effort and they would need to employ a proposal writer which would be too costly given the lack of confirmed success and the uncertain projected income. Their critical assessment of this onerous process reflects the increasing professionalization of NGOs and the accountability of the latter to their donors, all acting as a sign of the ‘NGO-ization’ of social movements and civil society (Waisbord, 2011). Radio Nagham refuses to write proposals for NGO spots but will do for private companies where the income is both more substantial and stable. The large Radio X said that although income from NGOs was easy, the content of the output would still be checked rigorously to ensure compatibility with the station’s policies and society’s values, citing spots promoting gay marriage as an example that would not be permitted. There was also an evident reluctance to work with certain NGOs, particularly those sponsored by large international donors such as USAID, because of the partner-vetting process. Several quoted clauses in donor agreements that required the recipients (in this case, both radio stations and NGOs) to sign that they had ‘never, (or not over the past ten years) provided, and will not provide, support or resources to terrorists or

terrorist organisations' (Harvard Law School, 2014: 26). Although this is defined within the framework of UN Conventions and Protocols, such terms will inevitably be challenged when applied within an occupied zone. NGOs may want to broadcast their radio spots to reach out to the community, but this process is impeded by cynicism from the stations regarding the stability and durability of NGO income, by the NGOs' own proposal procedures, and by their donors.

### **Subject areas versus geographical reach**

Despite the downward trend in NGO income mentioned by the radio stations – caused, amongst others, by the financial crisis, the Arab spring, Syria's civil war and the resultant diluted attention paid to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – NGO output remained sufficient for trends to be identified. All stated that women, domestic violence and incest were constant themes in the NGO-related material. Al Balad mentioned that corruption and accountability were currently in vogue whilst Raya stated that, in 2007-09, the main topics were freedom of speech and human rights in contrast to 2015 when the focus was on Bedouins and Area C.<sup>3</sup> 24FM also mentioned trends in subjects and that spots were cyclical reflecting agricultural seasons. The smaller radio stations highlighted that they were not being allocated exclusive NGO spots covering campaigns and causes specific to their geographical area; most of these campaigns would be broadcast to reach the whole of the West Bank population rather than just individual pockets where the NGO aid or campaign might have been of most help. Again, this reinforces the assumption (which is not supported by empirical evidence) that the Ramallah-based stations will capture the correct audience because of their larger reach, but does not account for the increased cost of broadcasting to a disinterested audience. This situation is slightly remedied by all spots broadcast by Radio X being also broadcast on Al Balad. This is effective as two stations, local and regional, are then targeting

one community, but the smaller station is not benefitting from the exclusivity or from any potential additional income an exclusive contract could generate. NGOs were aware of the competition and that they have little time to attract the audience's attention given the vast number of radio stations in the West Bank and the listeners' habits of changing between channels frequently. To attract attention, most NGOs include music in their spots, or a simple phone number (1-2-1 is the helpline number used by the women's NGO Sawa, for example, and is accompanied by a simple song so that it can be easily remembered by children) (Shomar, 2016). The same NGO is consistently innovative in its attempts to attract specific audiences and has used rap ('Why do diseases eat us', 'It's not a disgrace to laugh', 24FM, 2016) for example to target a particular youth audience in its AIDS-awareness campaign.

### **Production and stereotypes**

As both the quantitative findings and the radio interviews have shown, one of the main subject areas in NGO output relates to women. Yet, producing spots and episodes in these areas to ensure that they are appropriate for a given audience again highlights the evident lack of communication between radio stations and NGOs and the insufficient understanding by the former about how to reach targeted communities. Many NGOs reported the difficulties of having to work with radio stations' production teams as they frequently have had to resort to producing broadcasts again themselves or returning it many times after the radio stations have conducted inadequate research into the audience, resulting in spots similar in style to commercial adverts. WCLAC gave the example of a spot for rape victims produced by Radio X in 2015 (Abusrour, 2016). The spot was returned several times by the NGO as inappropriate and was ultimately sent out for tender with clear instructions regarding the contents. Until then, the actors were unsuitable; all the rape victims were portrayed stereotypically as only coming from villages; their voices were too happy; and the woman in

the spot was not identified by the use of her first name (this is considered *haram* (forbidden)), serving to anonymize the individual and distance the audience from the message. Abrusour at WCLAC likened the initial outcome to an advert for Jawwal, Palestine's communication company, rather than for victims of rape (2016). She declared that they would only be prepared to use Radio X again because of its geographical reach and that, generally, in order for the spots to gain greater penetration, the radios would need to acquire greater awareness of their own community.

This attitude, one that promotes a stereotypical portrayal of women's topic, is not specific to the West Bank but extends to Arabic media generally, according to Ahorouq Alada, manager of Montecarlo radio in Palestine and Dubai TV correspondent in Palestine when speaking on an NGO-supported programme on 24FM:

(Alada 2016)

There is a significant decline in social concepts, for example in dealing with women's issues, at home, work or even in the street. Religious views are mingled with political ones [...] I feel that getting rid of the occupation will never happen until we erase the wrong social concepts and become free within ourselves as men and women. A lot has to be done until we can say there is full equality for women working in media or the way they are portrayed by them. We still have a lot of work to do to improve these things in the Arab and local media.

This was reinforced by Abrusour at WCLAC (2016), who reported that,

...there is a stereotype about the radio, even the voice, even the way they are presenting the issues, even the vocabulary and the concept and the terminology that is used [...] and it's not changing the mentality and the attitudes of the public – I'm not quite sure to what extent the radio stations have a kind of strategic plan like any other organisation.

She added,

...and if they want to be part of the social change process in Palestine, they need to develop their programmes and to work on capacity building and awareness raising of their employees, their presenters and producers to try to look into things, you know, from a different perspective, not the patriarchal or stereotypes that we have in this society.

The almost dismissive attitude that prevails amongst radio stations towards NGOs because of their lesser commercial importance has resulted in ambivalence on the part of the stations towards the subject matter of the spots and radio programmes. This detracts from the women's NGOs' fundamental task of raising awareness about women's issues. The depth of analysis of a report or broadcast also remains problematic. As Munir (2015), representing WATC, an established women's NGO stated, 'We don't need to work hard to get the coverage in the media, but we need to work hard to get the attention from the audience. For example, we cover honour killings but they only get two lines, it is not covered in depth'. A new urgent task of these NGOs now is to train radio stations and change the prevailing stereotypes that emerge when covering women. WCLAC, for example, continues to run awareness-raising sessions for employees of the Ma'an Network (a major independent

broadcasting network in the OPT) resulting in the creation of a gender unit and becoming more gender-sensitive in their terminology and their presentation of women.

## **Conclusion**

This article has examined the interaction between NGOs and local commercial radio stations in the West Bank and the frustrations which arise on both sides in their interactions, as NGOs work with this potentially highly useful, yet currently limited, media tool within a patriarchal society and against a background of occupation. Six radio stations were used for the analysis alongside NGOs identified from the quantitative analysis as they broadcast material on these radio stations.

Local stations in the West Bank face constant restrictions and pressures from commercial sponsors, from the authorities within the OPT, and from the Israelis regarding the material they broadcast and the manner in which they produce it. They are subject to ongoing threats of damage, raids and closure by all of these forces, and their employees face personal and physical intimidation and arrest. Nonetheless, according to the literature, radio represents an optimal media source for marginalised communities in conflict-affected zones, particularly for women, providing the target audience with new information, raising awareness of sensitive issues and encouraging participation on community activities. However, in order to enhance their information provision, increase the effectiveness of NGO campaigns and, most importantly, amend the stereotypical portrayal of women and certain subjects, radio stations must improve their capacity building and raise awareness amongst of their employees.

The findings illustrate that the chosen radio stations in the West Bank cooperate with NGOs but do not contribute substantively, if at all, to encouraging their community-building



activities, and in fact restrict themselves to a commercial-based association, which could be expected from private sector enterprises. Certain NGO spots are broadcast free of charge but, according to the stations, this is part of their CSR strategy or is a commercially-based decision to attract more advertising. The stations were prepared to receive an effortless income from NGOs who approach them but would not willingly seek additional revenue from them through the complex proposal process. They were cynical about how the NGOs operate and asked whether they simply fund projects because they have been given both the money and a deadline, thus questioning the NGO environment and whether the money could be better targeted. As the Raya FM programme manager suggested, if NGOs want to combat specific problems they should target the relevant marginalised towns and villages – such as Jericho where radio stations do not receive spots from NGOs – rather than focusing on the Ramallah-based radio stations (Zamar'eh, 2016). This ironically reflects a major obstacle in the relationship regarding the lack of empirical data from stations. If data were available on the reach and audience of radio stations, the NGOs could then better target the marginalised communities they are trying to reach.

Despite frustrations with the medium itself and the need to be continually innovative to capture audience attention, the NGOs acknowledge the important role played by radio in the West Bank, in contrast to other media, in acting as amplifiers for their campaigns. It is low-cost, accessible to audiences and NGOs can choose the most appropriate radio station depending on the required geographical reach. However, for increased effectiveness, radio must be used in conjunction with social media. The NGOs also stated that using radio is less subject to constraints and corruption than television and the press and therefore they can cover more sensitive subjects more easily and be more openly critical of the authorities. They said they would increase their use of radio in the future but needed empirical evidence of its

effectiveness. NGOs felt that they would then be able to better target their own campaigns and in turn fine-tune the necessary role they play in this conflict-affected and occupied area.

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<sup>1</sup> On 31 January 2017, there were 98 fixed checkpoints in the West Bank, including 59 internal checkpoints (B'Tselem, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The Oslo Agreements, signed in 1993 between Israel and the PLO, sought to end the conflict by means of territorial concessions and facilitating the creation of the Palestinian Authority. They established interim governance arrangements and a framework to smooth negotiations for a final treaty. Attempts to re-start negotiations have been on-going ever since.

<sup>3</sup> 7000 Bedouins live in Area C. The latter forms 60 per cent of the West Bank and is under full Israeli civil and security control and has been allocated to settlements by Israel. The Bedouins face demolition and relocation orders and have no connections to water or electricity supplies (OCHA, 2017).